

The Existence of *Penting* Instruments in Gamelan Ensemble at Karangasem Regency, Bali

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Abstract

Penting gamelan ensemble was one form of Balinese gamelan ensembles that lived and developed in the eastern part of Bali, namely the Karangasem area. In this *penting* gamelan ensemble, *penting* types of instruments were very dominant both in terms of their usage and in terms of their musicality. *Penting* instrument was the only type of Balinese gamelan instrument that was played by picking the strings, while other types of Balinese gamelan instruments were mostly played by beating (percussion instruments). In Karangasem, there were several forms of *penting* gamelan ensembles. In an ensemble the number of *penting* instruments was not fixed. In fact, there was one music group which included *penting* instruments as the only instrument that functioned as melody. Another condition revealed was the small number of young people who were interested in learning to play *penting* instruments. They were more interested in learning other types of instruments. In addition there were also only a small number of *penting* instrument makers, because it was rare for people who want to possess *penting* instrument. By looking at such situations faced by *penting* instruments and *penting* gamelan ensembles, it could be said that the existence of this type of instrument was very alarming.

Keywords: *Penting* instruments, gamelan ensemble, Karangasem Regency.

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1. Introduction

Karawitan or often referred to as '*gamelan*', was a form of the life necessities for Balinese people. Balinese people saw *gamelan* not only as a means of entertainment, for fun, or partying, but more than that, *gamelan* was seen as a means to meet spiritual needs. Therefore the existence of *gamelan* in Bali had become very meaningful in the life of Balinese people. Broadly speaking, the function of Balinese arts was for the purposes of offerings and performances. The offerings were addressed to Ida Sanghyang Widhi or the Supreme Lord, so that the use of *gamelan* was included in the series of ceremonies, while the performances were aimed more at human needs in their life. Both of these functions could be proven by the existence of various types of Balinese *gamelan* ensembles that lived and developed in remote areas in Bali. The use of *gamelan* ensembles in ceremonies was a necessity that was covered by the concept of Panca Gita and Desa Kala Patra. Panca Gita was a concept in Hinduism teachings, which meant that in the implementation of the ceremony there must be sound elements from five sound sources, namely *mantram*, *genta*, *kentongan*, vocal (*kidung*), and *gamelan*. The ensemble type applied in the ceremony used the concept of the Desa Kala Patra, meaning that the use of *gamelan* ensemble in the implementation of the ceremony was adjusted to the abilities and habits that had been done before (tradition). In Bali there were around 38 types of *gamelan* ensembles and approximately ten types of new *gamelan* ensembles made by contemporary artists. Each of these entire types of *gamelan* ensembles had different shapes, functions, instruments, repertoires, and aesthetics. *Penting gamelan* ensemble was included in these Thirty-eight *gamelan* ensembles.

Based on observations, I found that *penting gamelan* ensemble had not used 'fixed' types of instruments, meaning that one *penting gamelan* group used different types and numbers of instruments with other *penting gamelan* groups. Thus, the life of *penting gamelan* ensemble could be considered less developed than the other *gamelan* ensembles which in general each of the *gamelan* ensembles used almost the same type and number of instruments.

In *penting gamelan* ensemble, *penting* was a very dominant instrument in both the use of instruments and musicality. This was like in *gambang gamelan* ensemble, which meant that in that *gamelan* ensemble, physically and musically, *gambang* was the most dominant instrument. But in reality, *penting* instruments could also function as a complement, not function as a basic instrument.

Penting instruments had unique shape. This instrument existed and developed in Bali especially in the eastern part of Bali, namely Karangasem. Besides being in the form of instruments, *penting* was also a term for the *gamelan* ensemble called *penting gamelan* ensemble. Unfortunately *penting gamelan* ensemble was not widely known by the public, especially in Karangasem area. This *gamelan* ensemble was not even well known among Balinese people. Thus, *penting* instrument and *penting gamelan* ensemble, were considered rare, because

only Karangasem had *penting gamelan* ensemble. In addition, the number of *penting gamelan* ensemble was also small.

The construction of *penting* instrument was very interesting. Almost all parts of this instrument were made of long wood of a certain size. Apart from the unusual shape, *penting* instrument was the only type of instruments in Balinese music that was played by picking the source of the sound, namely the string.

Regardless of the uniqueness and elegance possessed by *penting* instruments, the condition of *penting* instrument makers was very alarming. There were not many young people who were interested in learning this musical instruments even though other Balinese *gamelan* instruments attract many people to learn about the making and learning playing techniques. These were the problems that needed to be addressed immediately for the development of *penting* instruments in the future.

With such conditions, we should take concrete actions so that *penting* instruments were not eroded by the progress of the times.

2. Discussion

Penting instrument was the only type of Balinese *gamelan* instruments that was played by picking, while other types of Balinese *gamelan* instruments were mostly played by beating (percussion instruments). *Penting* instrument used strings as the sound source. There were nine strings on each *penting* instrument, consisting of six strings number two and the other three strings use the number four string. The nine strings were tuned in the same tone. In one *penting* instrument there were sixteen keys (position for pressing the tone), so that it could cause a minimum of two tunings, namely *slendro* and *pelog*.

The existence of *penting* instruments could be in a form of ensemble or *gamelan* ensemble called *penting gamelan* ensemble and could also be single instrument.

a. The formation of *gamelan* ensemble

As explained above, *penting gamelan* ensemble had not used *penting* instruments in certain variants and quantities. This meant that one *penting gamelan* group with other *penting gamelan* groups used different variants and different *penting* instruments. Even *penting* instruments were only used as a complement. For more details, we could look at the variants of *penting gamelan* ensembles below.



Penting gamelan ensemble (Doc. Pande Made Sukerta)

Picture of *penting gamelan* ensemble above showed that one *penting gamelan* group used several *penting* instruments and still used other variants of instruments such as the *kendang*, *gong pulu*, *suling*, and *ceng-ceng gecek* instruments. Regarding the formation of this *penting gamelan* ensemble, the number of instruments was dominated by *penting* instruments. In terms of musical groups, it was also dominated by the sound of *penting* instruments. In traditional musical performance, the intro part of was presented by one of *penting* instrument musicians, while the tempo and completion of the song was performed by *kendang* instrument player.

In other variants of *gamelan* ensemble, *penting* instruments acted as melody presenters. The picture could be seen below.



Terebang music with *penting* instrument (Doc. I Gede Putu Wiranegara, 1999)

In the *gamelan* ensemble above, *penting* instrument was the only instrument variant that served as a melody, while other variants of instruments were *tarebang* instruments which were played by being hit and in charge of maintaining rhythm. Musically, the traditional song performances in the ensemble above was dominated by *tarebang* instruments. In traditional song performance, the *kawitan* (intro) part in traditional song was presented by one of *penting* instrument players, while the tempo setting and closing of the traditional song performance were performed by one of the *tarebang* instrument players. Performances of *penting* instruments could also be used in the *gamelan* ensemble as shown below.



Penting gamelan ensemble (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTIunprtdE>)

The picture of *penting gamelan* ensemble above showed that a set of *penting gamelan* used several *penting* groups and was added with a variety of other instruments such as *kendang* instrument, *gong pulu*, and *ceng-ceng gecek*. In the formation of *penting gamelan* ensemble, the number of instruments was dominated by the use of *penting* instruments. Thus the musical presentation was dominated by the sound of *penting* instruments. In traditional song performance, the intro part in traditional song was presented by one of the *penting* instrument players, while the tempo setting and the ending of traditional song performance were performed by the *kendang* beater. The following was a simpler formation of *penting gamelan* ensemble.



Penting gamelan ensemble (Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dZBu-_kzjw)

The image of *penting gamelan* ensemble above were *penting gamelan* ensemble which was relatively smaller compared to other *penting gamelan* ensembles. This *penting gamelan* ensemble consisted of *timbang*, *gong pulu*, and *penting* instruments. In musical terms, the beat or sound of *penting* instruments was very dominant in presenting melodies. In the traditional song performance, part of the traditional song was presented by one of the *penting* instrument players, while the tempo and ending of the traditional song was performed by one of the *penting* instrument players.

In addition to the *penting gamelan* ensemble that had been explained, there was also *penting gamelan* ensemble that only used 2 (two) *penting* instruments. The *gamelan* ensemble was shown in the picture below.



Penting gamelan ensemble (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZxug-nd6RA>)

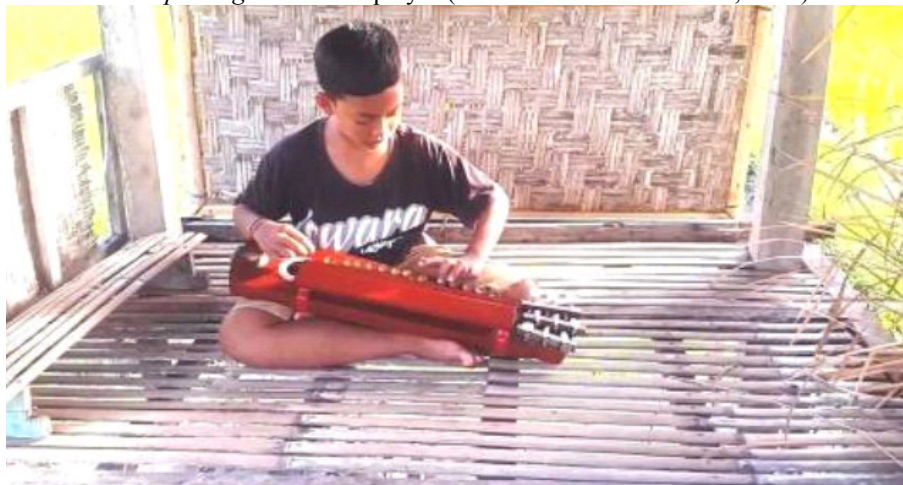
In the picture above, the size of *penting gamelan* ensemble was smaller than other *penting gamelan* ensembles. The *penting gamelan* ensemble used only two *penting* instruments. Each *penting* instrument had distinct tone patterns in one composition. The difference in the tone patterns would produce a series of tones. In a traditional Balinese musical performance the intro music was presented by one of the *penting* instrument players, while the tempo and ending of the musical performance was performed by one of the *penting* instrument players by giving certain codes.

b. Solo Instrument

'Solo' meant alone, in this case as solo instrument meant that *penting* instruments could be presented or could present musical performances independently. Thus it could be said that *penting* instruments could not only form an ensemble, but also could present a solo musical performance (independent music performance). Thus, a *penting* instrument as a solo instrument means that this instrument could be played or could present music performances independently and fulfill musical rules. There had been many music enthusiasts who presented *penting* instruments independently. The pictures below could give explanations.



Solo *penting* instrument player (Doc. Pande Made Sukerta, 2018)



Solo *penting* instrument player (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQZjflGhl7Y>)

By looking at the musical potential of *penting* instruments above, it could be said that *penting* instruments had the potential to be developed in Bali, not only in Karangasem area (eastern Bali) but in all regions of Bali. Its development was in the form of an ensemble or as a single instrument.

c. Special instrument

With the large number of *gamelan* ensembles in Bali coupled with many types and variants of instruments used in each *gamelan* ensemble, according to my observations, the types of instruments used in each *gamelan* ensemble in Bali were dominated by percussion instruments made from bronze. There were only one type of friction instrument, the *rebab* instrument, while instrument that were played by picking were only one type of instrument, *penting* instrument. When we considered at the use of *penting* instruments in *gamelan* ensemble, the interest of younger generation in learning into it, and the dissemination of abilities for the survival of this type of musical performance, it could be said that *penting* instruments were special and rare types of instruments.

Penting instruments were considered as special instruments due to several things as followed.

- 1) *Penting* had distinctive shape, very different from other types of instruments. This instrument was longitudinal shaped using nine strings of two sizes. The nine strings used the same tone.
- 2) *Penting* was the only instrument that was played by picking. It should be noted that the types of instruments used in Balinese *gamelan* ensemble were mostly played by beating (percussion instruments). Besides being played by picking, the desired tone and sound was also obtained by pressing the strings. In one press, the nine strings used would get all the pressure.

3. Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, we could conclude that *penting* instrument was the only type of Balinese *gamelan* instrument that was played by picking. This type of instrument used nine strings with two different sizes, but had the same tone setting. The composition of *penting gamelan* ensemble had not been fixed. That was, the types of instruments in each of *penting gamelan* ensembles were not the same, and even *penting* instruments were one type of instrument used in *terebang* music. The younger generation was less interested in learning *penting* instruments, *penting* instrument makers were also very rare. With such conditions, the existence of *penting gamelan* instruments and ensembles in Bali, especially in Karangasem was very alarming.

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